The History of Acceptance “Lunyu-yishu” in Ancient Japan

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Regarding the acceptance of the commentaries of the “Analects of Confucius” in ancient Japan, Japanese historical studies have discussed “Lunyu-jijie”, but have paid little attention to “Lunyu-yishu”. This article examines various aspects of the acceptance of “Lunyu-yishu” in ancient Japan and its historical development by the following methods: investigation of the nature of ancient Japanese books quoting “Lunyu-yishu”, the time of their formation, and human relationships around the editors; search of “Lunyu-yishu” in the ancient inventory of books; and search of the evidence of the acceptance of “Lunyu-yishu” in ancient historical records.

“Lunyu-yishu” was introduced to Japan in 738 (Tenpyo 10), and was accepted by Imperial princes, court nobles, middlegrade and lowgrade nobles, officials, priests of Buddhism, etc., and permeated among them through the Nara period and the Heian period.

From the 8th to 9th century, “Lunyu-yishu” was used by legal officials, who were the editors of “Koki”, “Shaku”, and “San”, to interpret legal codes. From the end of the 10th century to the beginning of the 11th century, it was used by Prince Tomohira, who was an imperial descendant, to investigate non-Buddhist scriptures quoted in “Shikan-bugyoden-guketsu”. In the first half of the 11th century, it was used by Koremune-no-Tadasuke, who was a teacher in laws and ethics, to clarify the precedents of court ceremonies and official duties, and by Fujiwara-no-Sanesuke, who was the Minister of the Right, to understand the ancient practices and usages. Among the priests of Buddhism, Kukai used “Lunyu-yishu” in the 9th century, and Chuzan of the Kohiuku-ji Temple of the Dharma-character school in the 10th century. In the last half of the 11th century, “Lunyu-yishu” was used in various Japanese classical books including Buddhist Scriptures. In the first half of the 12th century, Fujiwara-no-Yorinaga, who was the Minister of the Left, lectured on many Chinese classical books, one of which was “Lunyu-yishu”.

Writers and scholars with literary talent, who were also court nobles, middlegrade and lowgrade nobles, and officials, gathered especially around Prince Tomohira and Fujiwara-no-Yorinaga. Both of them played a key role in lectures and discussions on Chinese writings and literature in respective times. One of the books treated in such activities was “Lunyu-yishu”.
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